February 7, 1955

Dear Florence:

Your nice letter of January 23 came in good time and I have been wanting to write and answer some of your questions and to give you some news of all of us.

I am delighted that you found the Schweitzer book pleasant to read and worthy of showing around to people. The book is having a very good sale and is on the bestseller list in yesterday's Times Book Review section. It at least got listed at the bottom and that is more than we had expected since those lists are sent in something like ten days before the issue. The reviews have also been pouring in and the press has been generous.

You recall the difficulty between Virgil and Dick that arose a couple of years ago because of an interpretation. It was Beethoven or Bach, I have forgotten which. The same difficulty arose three or four weeks ago -- it was Handel this time -- and it looked for awhile that a deep division might be developing between them. After the first part of the "Creation" had been given three weeks ago yesterday, Gladys and I went down to compliment the two of them on the performance. We found Dick in such a state that he couldn't talk about it except in private so we went into the ministers' robing room and talked for nearly a half hour. Dick told of the problems he was having with Virgil. He said that he thought he was opinionated as to his own interpretation and unwilling to listen to what he or any of the soloists wanted. (So far as I know this matter never came before the choir as a whole; it was only a matter between the two men and the soloists.) Dick said that he would have nothing further to do with the rehearsals of the soloists even though Virgil had said he must always be present when soloists were rehearsed at the organ. He also complained again that Virgil was not at rehearsals as much as he should be, etc.

Because Dick was obviously in a "state" I drove him out to the house for supper and later Sunny and I drove him home.

A few days later Virgil was back and I had a session with him. He was greatly concerned and said in response to my challenge that he never doubted but what Dick should have the final say about the tempo at which a piece was to be played and he also said that he thought that it was Dick and not he who was losing his temper and losing emotional control. Furthermore, such matters as these could be resolved by their talking things through and he realized that he must give more time to this sort of thing.

Both men spoke to me critically of the other's musicianship or method of going about his job. Part of the problem is that Dick is Meticulous as to interpretation and Virgil is imaginative and intuitive in much of what he plays. It may be that Dick is correct in thinking that Virgil looks down his nose a bit at Dick's muscianship. It may also be true that Virgil's assurance of himself and his knowledge of how a work should be presented react negatively on Dick, forcing him to take positions that sometimes are hard to retreat from.

Also involved are those aspects of Dick's problem which we all recognise -- his ambition for a career of his own, his feeling of responsibility for his mother and aunt, his introspection. Even perhaps his not having enough to do. Virgil thinks he does not have many voice pupils.

It may well be that Dick does have a feeling of ineffectuality. In my talk with Virgil I spoke of Dick's need for help and wondered what we all could do. The next day, Saturday, January 22, I had a call from Dick who said he and Virgil at long last were having a talk. Was it true that I had said that he, Dick, needed help. I replied that I had said something to that effect but to take it out of context was to over exaggerate my meaning. I certainly wasn't saying that he needed to go to a psychiatrist or anything of that sort.

I went in to see Dick after part two of the "Creation" had been sung on the following day and apparently all was well again. At least their talk had seen them over another crisis.

Now Virgil is off on his regular two weeks' jaunt to the south, including ~~Nashau~~ Bermuda. After this week he is not to be doing much concertizing until after Easter; he will spend much of his time, as he should, seeing that things are done right at the organ in these last weeks of installation and tuning. Incidentally the report of the completion of the organ ~~was~~ very good and there is no doubt but that things will be in good shape for the services of dedication.

You ask for the minutes of the Dedication Committee Meeting.* (There has been no meeting of the Music Committee since you left.) There has been only one meeting of the Dedication Committee since you left and most of that meeting was devoted to a discussion of a letter that goes out to nearly 5,000 on the church's mailing list -- members, affiliates, and non-member contributors. Norris Tibbetts thinks that of the 5,000 there are no more than 3,000 who will be vitally concerned about the March 30 affair and, of course, of this number, many will be out of town or ill and unable to come. There will be something of an overflow but Norris is not inclined to think it will be very great. We agreed to reserve 500 seats for neighboring seats for neighboring institutions, representatives of religious and musical publications, American Guild of Organist people, and Virgil's selected list. The letter is going out to the membership shortly and the people will be asked to make their reservations for March 30, and if they can come also for Fox's separate recital on Friday evening, March 25.

* So far as I know, no minutes of the com. meeting were kept. None circulated anyway.

Dick has agreed that the ministry of music on Easter Sunday afternoon may be a part of the dedication series and at this time the work of the organ with the choirs will be given special notice.

There is no particular news of our family except that Wallace is now in Fort Sill, Oklahoma for his second eight weeks of basic training. He had about ten days at home at the end of his first eight weeks at Dix. He telephoned last night and says that they are mostly having classes and he is learning a great deal about artillery. It has the practical value of increasing his knowledge of math but it seems an incredible course of study for this day and age. But then, I guess it is not a Schweitzerian age.

Affectionately yours,

Eugene Exman:mdb